

One Clown's Observations  
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Articles are written and read on a regular basis on the subject of clowning. Videos are produced, seminars are held, Clown Colleges are popular events all over the country. Let's face it – clowning is happening all around us. You see clowns working their craft at birthday parties and visiting children in hospitals. Clowns are hired by corporations to entertain their employees at annual get-togethers. Clowns practice their art for children of all ages, whenever and wherever there are those who need happiness and silliness injected into their lives.

How do clowns become good at clowning? What's the secret of being a good clown? There have been hundreds of wonderful and talented clowns over the years. To discover their secrets, you might study their talents and their skills. You might try looking at the tools of their trade and the effort that goes into their clowning. Maybe you can discover their secret of clowning. Let's look at some of these things and see what we can see.

The first thing one will notice about a clown is the make-up and his appearance. Putting on make-up is not a difficult thing to do but it is something that should be done first with research and understanding. There are different make-up categories and with each category comes a different costume, a different personality and a different tradition. An observant clown who takes the time to learn about them will certainly have an advantage and will be on his way to looking and acting better than most. The clowns who look good are usually the ones who work at it.

When you see a clown at work, there are many talents commonly used. Balloon twisting is one of the more popular talents. Creating a colorful teddy bear which is holding its own balloon will make a terrific gift to any child. The clown will take a simple balloon, tie and twist it without it breaking it and finally present it as a gift. Almost every time, the recipient is glowing with joy and eager to show off his new prize. An observant clown will notice the child's eyes as they are fixed on the process, from creation to presentation. Of course creating balloon animals and other fine pieces takes hours of practice and determination. The clowns who make the best balloon creations are the ones who work at it.

Juggling is another art that clowns are known for. Clowns may juggle bean bags, balls, toys or a variety of objects. Some will make a routine to look silly and some will look accomplished and professional. An observant clown will see the audience become thrilled with the talented performance or giggle at the silliness, as a bungling juggler acts as if he has no juggling talent at all. Again, the clowns who are good at it are the ones who work at it.

Magic is another popular performance art which is skillfully done by clowns. There are hundreds of tricks that may be performed by clowns. There are card tricks, coin tricks, handkerchief tricks, dice tricks, clever tricks, silly tricks and much, much more. An observant magic performing clown will watch and listen to the audience and respond to their comments, ultimately and magically enhancing the performance. Again, the clowns who are good at it are the ones who work at it.

At circuses, clowns will work the crowds and oftentimes perform skits. There are skits that have been performed for decades and new skits are created every day. Skits require taking an idea,

communicating that idea in a simple-to-understand and humorous way and then having it culminate in a surprising and funny conclusion. This takes creativity, writing, timing, props, music and rehearsals. An observant clown skit performer will feed off the audience and use their energy and responses to lead them in one direction, only to surprise them with something entirely different and hopefully, hilarious. Again, the clowns who are good at it are the ones who work at it.

I know what some of you are thinking about where I am leading you. As I have said several times, working at your craft is the best way to keep getting better. Ultimately, in clowning and with almost everything, practice is important. However, the observant reader might have been led to another conclusion.

Using your powers of observation will help you become better at being a clown. Observing others in the clowning world will certainly give you ideas. Observing the rules and traditions will help you to be smarter and better prepared. Observing the training rituals of your instructors and clown colleagues will help you to understand the tools necessary to improve yourselves as clowns. Most importantly however, is observing your audience.

Watch your audience's reactions to you and your clowning. Listen to their questions and comments. Respond to them and their wishes. Interaction is the result. The communication between the clown and his audience is the key. Certainly "practice" is important to any endeavor. By also practicing your powers of observation, you will discover the differences between "acting like a clown" and actually "being a clown." Finally, as with most things that have included preparation and practice, your rewards will be remarkable.

Thank you for your attention and as always, keep smiling.

"Do-No"